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by Imai Tadashi

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FOREWORD

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JAPANESE STUDY ON COMMUNIST FORCES IN LAOS

Following is a full translation of an article by Imai Tadashi entitled, "Communist Forces on the Move in Laos," in the Japanese language periodical Kaigai Jijo (Overseas Affairs), Vol 7, No 11, 5 November 1959, published by the Overseas Affairs Research Institute, Takushoku University, Tokyo. Imai is a staff member of the Public Information and Cultural Affairs Bureau, Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Laos Situation Becomes an International Issue

Laos is one of the few remotely located countries in Southeast Asia. It has 231,400 square kilometers of land, or roughly three times the size of Hokkaido, which consists almost entirely of mountains and jungles. Most of the total population of 3.5 million persons are engaged in farming which still uses extremely primitive methods of production. Laos is a mountain nation situated in northeastern Indochina. It is surrounded by two Communist Bloc countries of Communist China and North Vietnam in north and east, by anti-Communist Thailand and neutral Burma in West. Geographically speaking, it could be the center of cold-war in Southeast Asia. Recently the arm conflicts between the government troops and the former Pathet Lao forces became intense and, in response to the request of the Laos Government, the UN Laos Situation Investigation Sub-committee was dispatched to make on-the-spot investigation of the troubled area. The outcome of the whole situation is attracting the attention of various countries. The development of the Laos situation, however, has already been sufficiently reported by newspapers and magazines and the truth of the situation will undoubtedly will come out of the UN Investigation Sub-committee; consequently, this article will not touch on this subject and will concentrate on the dissertation of the Communist forces in Laos, the prime mover in the current outbreak of civil war in Laos.

According to a report, the Laos Communist Party has 3,500-4,000 members (at one time it was reported to have 7,000 members). In 1950, the Laos Communist Party, in close cooperation with North Vietnam, created the Pathet Lao Government and, in 1953, by taking advantage of the invasion of Laos by the North Vietnam troops, carried out the anti-France movement and quickly expanded the power. The Pathet Lao Forces were concentrated in the two

provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, both adjacent to North Vietnam, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Armistice Agreements. Prince Souphanouvong, the leader of the Pathet Lao, is a brother of Prince Souvanna Phouma, a political leader of Laos, but the former has resisted the Laos Government ever since the conclusion of the Indochina Armistice by consolidating the two provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua like an independent country and controlling its political power.

In 1956, a treaty was concluded with the Laos Government to hand over the control of the two provinces to Laos and to create a coalition government which includes the representation from the Pathet Lao. A part of the Pathet Lao forces were transferred into the national army, while the rest of the forces were disarmed and demobilized. The Laos Communist Party then became the Neo Lao Hak Sat and became active in politics.

However, this friendly atmosphere collapsed in less than two years. The break came when the present Sananikone Cabinet, formed in August last year, switched its foreign policy from neutralism to pro-US anti-Communist, and began purging the cabinet ministers representing the Neo Lao Hak Sat. The cadre members of the Neo Lao Hak Sat, who were oppressed, fled one by one to North Vietnam and from there they began undertaking underground activities against the Laos Government.

In May of this year, the Sananikone Cabinet intensified the oppression of leaders of the Neo Lao Hak Sat and also attempted to disarm the two battalions of former Pathet Lao forces which had been transferred over to the national army. One battalion, which was in the Luang Prabang area, surrendered to the government troops by obeying orders and giving up arms, but the other battalion, which was in the Xieng Khouang area, escaped the government troops and fled into the North Vietnam border region. At that time the demobilized members of the former Pathet Lao forces in Phong Saly and Sam Neua Provinces were organized into militia units, and it seems that the battalion which fled from the Xieng Khouang area into the northern border region had combined with the demobilized former Pathet Lao forces. In August, despite the rainy season, these forces again became active in the two provinces.

The government promptly placed Prince Souphanouvong and nine former leaders of the Pathet Lao under house arrests and proclaimed a state of emergency in the five northern provinces of Phong Saly, Sam Neua, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, and Vientiane. After August, the quality of weapons used and the type of operations employed by the insurgent forces attacking the government troops stationed at Muong Het, Xien Kho, Sop Sai, and Sop Hao, located along the Nam Ma River in the North Vietnam border region, improved considerably, and the government, taken this to be the result of intervention by the North Vietnam Communist troops in the affairs, expanded the state of emergency proclamation throughout the country and also brought the matter over to the United Nations.

Organizational Activities of the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Communist Party)

The "Laos crisis", whether it is a "civil war", which North Vietnam claims it is, or an "aggressive intervention of North Vietnam", which the Laos Government insists it is, will probably be decided by the UN Investigation Sub-committee; however, in any event, it is easy to see from the relationship between the former Pathet Lao and North Vietnam that the Neo Lao Sat is either led or supported by North Vietnam. During the first part of August, on his way back from a visit to the Soviet Union, Ho Chi Minh, head of North Vietnam, stopped in China to have a meeting with the Chinese Communist leaders. Naturally, the Laos situation had definitely been discussed at that meeting and it is not hard to believe that that meeting does not have anything to do with the subsequent development of the "civil war in Laos."

The organizational activities of the Neo Lao Hak Sat in the Phong Saly and Sam Neua Provinces are similar to those of the Chinese Communist at the time when Mao Tse-tung had gained control of the political power and also those of the Vietnam Labor Party of North Vietnam (which was reorganized from the former Indochina Communist Party, disbanded in November 1945). The organizational activities of the Neo Lao Hak Sat consist of three parts; one, the organization of party cells to create cadres among the masses; second, the propaganda work to communize the masses; and third, the people's army to carry out secret military operations. All these activities are supervised and controlled by the Politbureau and are carried out concurrently with the other party activities.

The method for creating "party group" with the party cells formed around the nuclei of "heroes" of the Communist Party, is identical to that used by the Communist Party in other countries; however, what differs from the other countries is that, in Laos, if the troops going to the front line to fight in "civil war" so desire, they can take their families with them, and that in the organization of party cells, the emphasis is placed on the creation of "family group" organizations.

The "family group" is a collective body made up of 5-10 families and led by a Communist Party leader. This group meets regularly once every five days. At the meeting, the leader gives the members the ideological education, or let the members engage in their self criticism, and gradually "brain-wash" them, so that they will be trained to disobey the existing government. A family, once joined, cannot get out of the organization, because if it tries to get out, it will be threatened by the people's army and punished mercilessly by the party.

There are three types of punishments meted out by the peasants organization of the Neo Lao Hak Sat; they are, "expulsion", "re-education", and "secret trial." Under the "expulsion" punishment, the offender is completely isolated from the village people and, during the isolation, he is not given food or living quarters and is not allowed to see or talk to his family. Under the "re-education" punishment, the offender is kept in an isolated camp and is

given an education on Communism. The most severe punishment is the "secret trial", which is carried out in a strict secrecy. These punishments are executed resolutely by the party and the government and police have no power to intervene in them.

Like in the other countries, the women's federation, the youth federation, and the peasants' federation are all controlled by the Communist Party and are actively participated in the party activities. The Laos Women's Federation (Samakhom Mae Nying Lao), the Laos Youth Federation (Samakhom Sao Num), and the Laos Peasants Federation (Samakhom Sao Hai Na) are all playing an important role in the communization of the masses. Through these powerful organizations, the party trains the masses to disobey the orders issued by the village chiefs. Whenever there is a village chief undesirable to the party, the party promptly mobilizes these organizations and, by using their names, petition the provincial chief for the removal of the village chief. In this way the party can gradually replace all the "undersirable" village and section chiefs with the persons sympathetic to the Neo Lao Hak Sat and finally establishes the whole administrative organs of the villages and counties which follows the instructions of the Neo Lao Hak Sat.

After the village and county administrative organs are replaced with the anti-government groups, the general public, which neither has political awareness nor ability to criticize politics, will be comparatively easily converted into the anti-government forces.

The Neo Lao Hak Sat made an unexpected political gain after the supplemental election held in May this year (the election was held to elect 21 new members of the national assembly, 20 regular members and one alternate member, to increase the number of seats from 39 to 59, effected by the inclusion of Sam Neua and Phong Saly Provinces into Laos). Of the 21 seats, the Neo Lao Hak Sat captured nine and became the second powerful political party, exceeded only by the National Party. This new trend indicates the existence of a strong party organization in the two provinces. Regarding the outcome of this supplemental election, a government organ had made the following comments: "The party organizations casted their votes according to the instructions of the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Communist Party) and the family groups casted their votes, under the threats of the Neo Lao Hak Sat, against the candidates selected by the government. In some communities, the foreigners were banned from the communities and instructions have been issued to give no food and shelter to the foreigners. In some villages, the Neo Lao Hak Sat interfered with the distribution of government posters, publications, and instructions, and propagated its own principles. Anyone who opposed these actions were threatened by the secret military forces. These threats were made directly or indirectly to frighten the people."

Foreign Communist Strength in Laos

Laos has about 15,000 Vietnamese and 10,000 Overseas Chinese. It is difficult to tell what percentage of these two groups are

North Vietnamese and Communist Chinese. The Vientiane District, however, has about 2,500 North Vietnamese and northern Thailand, on the opposite bank of the Mekong River, also has about 4,000 North Vietnamese. The espionage units of the Vietnam Labor Party (Communist Party) are very active in northern Thailand, and it seems that the North Vietnamese population in the Vientiane District are receiving instructions and orders from these espionage units. Each day a large group of vegetable and rice peddlers with women and children from the North Vietnamese villages in northern Thailand crosses the Mekong River and comes to do business in the towns in Vientiane District, and, needless to say, that the contact men of the Vietnam Labor Party enter the area with this group of peddlers. It has been reported that Tchepons is the contact point for central and southern Laos, the area in south of Thakhek.

From ancient time, northern Laos has been known as the main route of the opium smugglers. In recent years, however, the North Vietnam-South Laos-Cambodia route is also used frequently by the narcotic smugglers. It seems that the main source of revenue to finance the activities of the Vietnam Labor Party comes from opium smuggling.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where the office of economic delegation of Communist China is located, is the center of Communist China's activities in Indochina. Vientiane in northern Laos and Pakse in southern Laos are also well-known operational bases of Communist China.

The Overseas Chinese School in Vientiane is strongly pro-Communist. Its former schoolmaster was ordered to leave the country because of his pro-Communist activities. It was reported that, at present, he is teaching a school in Phnom Penh. The Overseas Chinese School in Vientiane now has a Chinese Communist who came from South Vietnam to handle the organization of the Patriotic Overseas Chinese League.

During the summer of this year, the Communist elements in Indochina held a meeting in Pakse District. The presiding officer at the meeting was Tran Ba Quang, the cultural section chief of the Chinese Communist Party in the Pakse District, who is actively carrying out the cultural propaganda work against the workers and peasants in the district. The main source of Tran Ba Quang's operational expenses is also narcotics. It was reported that, at one time, he even engaged in the sale of opium to raise funds.

The Chinese Communist Party is not as active in Laos as in Cambodia. It seems that the main emphasis of the party is not to infiltrate among the Laotian people but rather to gain the controlling power of the Overseas Chinese population in Laos. The activities against the Laotian people, it seems, is being left to Ho Chi Minh, head of North Vietnam, who has close contact with Pathet Lao.